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Information Report

**Incidental Observations Gathered During Research  
In Combat Units**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY . . . . .	iii
BASIS OF THE OBSERVATIONS . . . . .	1
OFFENSE-MINDEDNESS . . . . .	4
LEADER-FOLLOWER CONTACT . . . . .	6
ROUTINE COMMUNICATIONS AS MORALE FACTORS . . . . .	9
TRAINING FOR THE SPECIFIC COMBAT SITUATIONS . . . . .	10
SUPPORT GAINED FROM KNOWLEDGE OF ASSOCIATES' LIKELY REACTIONS . . . . .	12
PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT GAINED FROM PERSONAL WEAPONS . . . . .	14
FAILURE OF COMBAT COMMUNICATIONS . . . . .	17
CONCLUDING COMMENT . . . . .	18

### Summary

In the course of interviewing 650 infantry men who had recently engaged in Korean combat large numbers of incidental observations were made. These observations are a by-product of one phase of another research project concerned with the characteristics of proven fighters. These observations are not presented as scientific facts, or as the opinions of well-rounded military experts. They are simply aspects of the psychological and human relations problems frequently encountered in frontline combat. Since the Army will continue to face such problems in the future, some partial solutions have been suggested as points of departure for further study.

There are seven continuing problem conditions discussed in this report. They are:

- (1) Many troops never become offense-minded.
- (2) At the squad and platoon levels, during crucial situations, leader-follower contacts sometimes unnecessarily fail.
- (3) The foot soldier often does not have a sufficient understanding of the on-going battle situation.
- (4) Some troops have not been well-trained in problems specific to their particular combat situation.
- (5) Squad members quite frequently do not know how much

they can count on the men around them.

- (6) The weapon which inspires the most individual confidence is often not the weapon a man carries into combat.
- (7) Breakdown in combat communications is sometimes paid for with unnecessary loss of life.

In the body of this report the above-named points are not only discussed and illustrated, but some tentative solutions are also suggested.

## INCIDENTAL OBSERVATIONS GATHERED DURING RESEARCH IN COMBAT UNITS

### Basis of the Observations

The observations presented in this report are incidental by-products of a current research task designed to measure personality differences between effective and ineffective combat soldiers. The first step of the research was to identify two groups of soldiers-- those who had performed well and those who had performed poorly in Korean combat. The second step was to give a battery of psychological tests to these two groups. Then, as a third step, the obtained scores will be analyzed so that any personality differences between the two groups of men can be studied and evaluated. The observations reported in this paper were made during the completion of the first step. The second step is now in progress.

Approximately 650 men from the 45th, 2nd and 7th Infantry Divisions were interviewed as a means of identifying the two groups of soldiers mentioned above. Those particular units within each division which had the most extensive close combat contact during the last month of the war were interviewed. Elements within these units were selected for interviewing on the same basis. This selectivity was carried down to the squad level. Therefore, a very high percentage of the 650 men interviewed had recently engaged in small arms contact with the enemy.

In most cases the interviewing was preceded by battalion and regimental staff briefings regarding the action. These briefings aided immeasurably in selecting the proper units for study; in providing an overview of the situation; and in supplying a concrete frame of reference in which to place details derived from the interview. Interview time, per man, varied from five minutes to two hours depending on the interviewee's personal characteristics and experiences.

In the course of interviewing, many incidental observations were made which were not related to the primary purpose of the interview. These observations often noted the excellent preparation, equipment, and leadership of the men, but also continuing problems of Army combat were observed. Of the observations related to these continuing problems, several emerged and took precedence, in terms of both strength and frequency of mention. This paper will deal with these "often-referred-to" problem points.

It should be noted that these points are not presented as scientific findings, but rather as a collection of a large number of observations gathered in the interviews. They are not presented as the thoughts of military men, but rather as the psychological or human relations aspects of certain problems with which the military leader has to cope. In some cases, even though our consideration of these

problems was necessarily brief, we have suggested possible approaches to partial solutions. These are presented as tentative points of departure which may be considered as worthy of further attention.

The most frequently mentioned observations will be listed here, and discussed at more length in the following sections. The observations, briefly stated, were:

- (1) Many troops never become offense-minded.
- (2) During crucial situations, especially at the squad and platoon level, leader-follower contacts sometimes unnecessarily fail.
- (3) The foot soldier often does not have a sufficient understanding of the on-going battle situation.
- (4) Some troops have not been well-trained in problems specific to their particular combat situation.
- (5) Squad members quite frequently do not know how much they can count on the men around them.
- (6) The weapon which inspires the most individual confidence is often not the weapon a man carries into combat.
- (7) Breakdown in combat communications is sometimes paid for with unnecessary loss of life.

In the body of this report the above-named points are discussed and exemplified. In some cases, tentative solutions have been suggested.

### Offense-Mindedness

The importance of having an offense-minded squad is well appreciated by experienced commanders. Briefly put, offense-mindedness is the soldier's realization and belief that during active combat nothing is more important than killing enemy troops. As such, it involves controlling many personal impulses, such as self-preservation, and dedicating oneself to the singular business of killing the enemy.

A lack of offense-mindedness, as we saw it, manifested itself most frequently in one of two general ways. They were:

- (1) Sometimes, during the height of combat, the individual soldier would engage in some socially acceptable, non-combat activity which would take him to a safer area.
- (2) At other times, during barrage and enemy attack, the individual soldier would concern himself solely with seeking cover. (This often allowed the enemy to gain a fatal advantage.)

It was common for the soldier nearest a wounded man to forget the importance of moving forward and to concern himself with caring for and/or evacuating the wounded man. As a result, after a few men had been hit the attack was likely to bog down. Then the enemy, no longer having to fear our advances, could concentrate effective fire on those men helping their buddies.

An example which contains elements of both the above-mentioned inadequate behaviors is the following. During an attack over a bitterly contested area five men from one company sealed themselves in a bunker by blocking the doors and windows with sand bags. For three days they lived on four cans of food. During this time the hungry men watched enemy troops bring supplies into the immediate area. Though they observed the enemy, they did not fire their weapons for fear of attracting attention. Each night they made plans to return to friendly positions, but did not do so because they did not want to leave their wounded buddy behind. On the fourth day a friendly round destroyed the bunker. The men were forced to leave the wounded man in the remains of the bunker, and return to friendly positions during daylight. A detail was able to recover the wounded man.

The importance of continuing forward movement during offensive action, and active aggression during defensive action, is of course, at present contained in the ATP. It seems possible, however, that a more graphic presentation could be obtained and presented. Such a device should vividly spell out the fact that "escape to safety by doing something socially acceptable" is not only less than completely honorable, but often it is nothing more than an ostrich play. The presentation could go on to show how

such actions permit the enemy to organize and mount an effort which eventually kills or wounds the "half-way" soldier. Of importance would be a careful description of the types of action appropriate under what circumstances, and what types of orders. For example in what situations should a soldier ignore a wounded buddy? Perhaps a training film, accompanied by example problems and a critique could serve these functions. In this way, behavior, formerly considered as acceptable, might come to be considered cowardly, and as a consequence combat units would become more offense-minded.

#### Leader-Follower Contact

During the emotional stress of combat, many soldiers will follow anyone who "does something." Consequently, the success or failure of the squad depends to a marked extent upon the leader and what he is doing. For this reason the importance of the initiative and integrity of the junior NCO leader probably cannot be overestimated. There were situations where the competence, courage, and sometimes mere presence of a respected leader virtually saved a situation. There were also clear-cut cases where a leader's obvious fear, inability to control himself, poor decisions, or even mere absence were responsible for the loss of tactical advantages, men and equipment.

In successful units, the frequency of personal contact between leader and subordinate, primarily from company level down, seemed to be in direct proportion to the current severity of stress. On a quiet night once per hour might be frequent for a squad leader to see each man. Under intense barrage, however, men need to see their squad leader oftener, just as the platoon leader needs the support gained from talking with his company commander. During small arms exchanges, the almost constant presence of a "stronger" person appears essential for many men to function effectively.

In one area, a company position was overrun. Two men did not see a leader during the entire action. They stayed in their position until daylight, not knowing what was going on and not doing anything. In the morning, while attempting escape to a rear area, one of them was killed when they ran into three Chinese. The other GI managed to return with this story. In a more advanced position in the same area, another squad leader kept his men together, and succeeded in getting out to rejoin the counterattacking force. In another position on this same sector, another company was overrun. Other platoons and company headquarters were virtually wiped out, while one entire platoon scarcely engaged with the enemy. Many of the men in the surviving platoon observed the enemy only 50 to 75 yards away, on top of their Company Command

Post, but almost no one fired. As nearly as could be determined, the acting platoon sergeant was a PFC who was unable to take over, and a Pvt. E-2 said that they should not fire because it would give away their positions. Although a few fired anyway, this passive idea, expressed by the private, was the directing force in the minds of the majority. At the time the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and assistant platoon sergeant were out of action for various reasons.

More active recognition of the junior leader as the focal point that he is would further stress the importance of sparing no effort in preparing junior leaders, especially up to platoon commanders, for immediate combat responsibilities. Junior leaders need to see and feel that their superiors believe they are important. In fact, any policy or practice might be of value if it successfully communicates to the leader the idea that he has great prestige, and that this prestige springs from the confidence and trust his men have in him. A device such as regularly scheduled NCO conferences at the regimental or battalion level, where NCOs meet for panel discussion, films, and group solution of problems directly concerned with NCO activity could pay off. Routine full training for alternate leaders should also be included. Perhaps a vivid recounting of the ineffective leader's usual types of failures,

and modes of rationalization and cover up would be of value. Such discussion might show leaders where they fail, and how to improve. This sort of training would, of course, be restricted to NCO consumption.

#### Routine Communications as Morale Factors

It is most understandable that a superior may take psychological comfort and support from a comprehensive understanding of the military situation. Yet, he may fail to recognize the importance of "passing on down" those security-free aspects of such information which could be of emotional aid to those under him. It is equally understandable that, even when in hazardous situations, few subordinates will inquire about many of the things that could make them feel more assured. The two communication blocks, failure to ask and failure to tell, seem to indicate that a formal program of a more positive and explicit nature be considered.

Lack of knowledge supports many fears or erroneous beliefs. For example, it was common for riflemen to assume that the enemy artillery and mortar were much more effective than ours. Of course, our riflemen often had no comparative evidence on which to base such estimates; nor did they have evidence to the contrary. But, at the same time, from their own personal and emotional points of view, their opinions were right. They had not been told that frequently our artillery and mortar saturations were nearly

double those of the enemy, even without taking into account our more effective ammunition.

Reassuring communications are probably possible, but as yet may not have been fully utilized. Of course, the kind of information relayed should be geared to the situation and security requirements. We do believe, that many individuals would gain significant emotional support from any organized attempt along this line. It should be understood that this suggestion does not attempt to specify in what fashion, or to what extent, such a procedure should be enacted.

Many men have a fine "feel" for the kind of reporting and fact-stating that can bolster the morale and allay the fears of the frontline soldier. This is done to some extent in divisional and regimental newspapers. Often, however, these information devices are not delivered when they are needed most. A more immediate transmission of currently reassuring information should be attempted.

#### Training for the Specific Combat Situation

Many of the interviewees felt that the troops had not been completely or properly trained for Korean combat. Most frequently mentioned was the belief that troops had not had enough states-side training in night fighting skills. The skills considered most important involved moving quietly in the dark; interpreting night noises

correctly; firing accurately; and understanding the problems of night cover and concealment. Night firing accuracy might be improved by utilizing the recent research results obtained by AFF HRU No. 3. Additional night training emphasizing the other skills listed above might also increase the individual soldier's combat effectiveness.

Korean fighting men have not been convinced that an adequate lookout during a heavy barrage is important. Although this was mentioned briefly in the section on offense-mindedness, it is particularly relevant here because of the nature of Korean fighting. Many small unit commanders believe that the danger of having men caught in bunkers or covered positions is greater than danger accompanying a barrage. Some say they immediately destroy all covered positions when taking over a new area.

The extent to which training can convince men that lookouts are important remains to be seen; certainly altering behavior of this sort is always difficult. Perhaps a training film, problem examples and critique sessions would have some merit in this regard. These devices, if employed, should cite instances where positions have been entered, and men captured or killed because the soldiers stayed in their bunkers when the enemy moved in under a barrage.

Possibly first-hand experience in estimating the flight path of various types of large missiles would also be of value. This might best be accomplished by employing an appropriate test of the speed and accuracy of identification in conjunction with night firing of defused rounds at targets placed near the bunkers.

Support Gained From A Knowledge of Associates' Likely Reactions

There were examples of new men in a squad not being considered trustworthy until they proved themselves through experience. This attitude had a crippling effect on squad unity, and could not possibly aid squad planning or squad confidence. Probably worse were instances where squads composed partly of strangers became engaged in hazardous activity, and a serious loss occurred because men were forced to depend on strangers, who failed them. If it is known in advance that a man does not know his weapon or is clumsy or too frightened to do what he should, he will not be taken on patrol. If it is known that he might "bug out," he may be placed between men of proven courage who will watch him closely. If he is unobservant or poorly trained he will not be made point man. If he does not clean his weapon well, it will be checked more closely by the squad leader. All such considerations rest on the squad members knowing each other.

As bad as over-estimating an individual is under-estimating him, as this leads to improper use of his abilities, and to poor morale on his part. It is felt that there is some danger of under-estimating minority groups. That is, any minority group member who is integrated into a squad should have more than the usual amount of time to become known and to prove himself on an individual basis, because there seems to be a tendency to mistrust their capabilities. An inordinately large percentage of men, particularly in some units, stated that KATUSAs were no good, that they would sleep on guard, "bug out," refuse to work, or pretend not to know what was expected of them. This mistrust may stem from fact or it may result from pre-existing attitudes. It seems likely that both are involved, because some units have a long history of "good" KATUSAs. Many people made the statement that a KATUSA or Puerto Rican or Negro is either an excellent fighter, or he is no good at all. If such "extremes" exist it seems highly likely that they are not inherited. To the extent that either this "extremes" behavior, or the mistrust in general is based on factual performance of minority members, it seems likely that such behavior is determined by the press of circumstances and differences in backgrounds. That is, particularly the KATUSA and the Puerto Rican are different from the GI.

There is a language barrier and there are different living habits. Therefore, the KATUSA or Puerto Rican is less likely to be accepted by the group. Hence, he does not feel either the acceptance by the group or the responsibility for the group which is thought to contribute so much to individual combat effectiveness.

In order to give men who possess capabilities the chance to be recognized and trusted in their own right, and in order to allow squad members to become acquainted with each other's real deficiencies, some form of unit rotation on the line might help. That is, rotation off the line when unit strength dropped below some level, followed by immediate filling of the unit and a refamiliarization period prior to reentry into combat would seem particularly important in the integration of foreign minority groups, as well as the acceptance of replacements. It would also be desirable to orient soldiers in basic training regarding the possible use of foreign nationals in our Army units. Some indoctrination regarding the capacities and limitations of such squad additions might be helpful.

#### Psychological Support Gained From Personal Weapons

In the past few years much has been written about the relative effectiveness of the M-1 rifle, M-2 carbine, BAR and various other infantry weapons. Some have emphatically stated that the

M-2 carbine was considered virtually useless by the men in Korea. This may have been true in the winter of 1950-51. It was not true in 1953. Almost without exception, the GIs we interviewed preferred the M-2 carbine. The majority liked the M-2 for patrol activity because it was lighter and had a much higher rate of fire. (Some few thought it was not used accurately, and expended too much ammunition.) Surprisingly, many of the men involved in the Pork Chop action, 6 July to 12 July 1953, said the M-2 carbine was better than the M-1 rifle. It seems that, even in rain and mud, it could be kept in operating order longer than either the M-1 or BAR. (The M-2, they said, could be carried easily, even when they had to protect the firing mechanism with their hand. Because of the rain the men liked a gun which loaded from underneath. Furthermore, when it did jam, the M-2 was easier to clear than the M-1.)

The BAR was also liked. Almost every man we questioned praised it. Most men wished their units had more, even though most squads had at least two already. Among other things, several men stated that the Chinese were scared of it, and tried to knock it out or capture it at every opportunity. The majority of men we interviewed did not like the M-1 because it was heavy and slow-firing.

The main point to be made about weapons is that some weapons carry more psychological weight with soldiers than do other weapons. Whatever the reasons, it seems there are many soldiers who feel safer, act more coolly and deliberately, and perhaps more bravely when they have an automatic weapon in their possession or vicinity. This is particularly true for night actions. This point is mentioned, even though there are some practical problems of supply and fire control, because it is felt that the individual soldier's psychological effectiveness in tight combat situations has not always received the recognition it deserves, especially in terms of devices which will implement this effectiveness.

A number of men suggested that additional states-side training in "distance and accuracy throwing" of hand grenades was needed. It is difficult to say just what training might be effective in accomplishing greater proficiency in this area. It does seem, however, that types of grenades and their particular characteristics should be given more training emphasis. This is mentioned because one new grenade does not make a noise when the pin is pulled and the handle released, therefore a number of men were killed by simply waiting for the 'typical' hand grenade noise before throwing it.

### Failure of Combat Communications

The frequent failure of combat communications was striking. Every frontline unit used both wire and radio communications. Almost all enemy attacks were preceded by heavy mortar and artillery fire. This barrage served, among other things, to break the wire-phone communication. This would often be followed by the radios, particularly the SCR-10, becoming inoperative. This often was disastrous. The battalion did not know what was going on at the company; the company didn't know what was happening at the platoon; and the platoon remained ignorant of squad problems, because the unit was left without communication other than that of runner. Some units did not use runners effectively because of dangers involved.

It is felt then, that breakdown of communications is an important problem. The mode of employment and use of communications equipment need greater stress in training. Perhaps a higher proportion of truly skilled communications personnel would help to maintain better operational utilization of existing communications equipment. In any event, it seems essential that the small unit be equipped with a reliable means of communication other than the wire-phone.

### Concluding Comment

Again it should be pointed out that a large number of impressions were gathered from all sides of the picture, but the above-mentioned points were deficiencies which occurred with impressive regularity and frequency. While the various points are probably not new, the fact that they still occur with regularity emphasizes the effort that should be given to their solution.